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Let every honest man, then, take care to do what in him lies to protect himself from this great wrong, and never rest, until the faith of his country has been redeemed, and its honor secured from reproach.

ART. VI. — *History of the Conquest of Mexico, with a Preliminary View of the Ancient Mexican Civilization, and the Life of the Conqueror, Hernando Cortés.* By WILLIAM H. PRESCOTT, Author of the "History of Ferdinand and Isabella." New York : Harper & Brothers. 1843. 3 vols. 8vo. pp. 488, 480, and 524.

MR. PRESCOTT has given proof of moral courage, as well as literary industry, by the publication of a new and elaborate historical work, before the applause with which his history of Ferdinand and Isabella was received has "died into an echo." An author's former self is his own worst enemy, and the great success of a first literary enterprise is likely to paralyze rather than stimulate a highly sensitive nature, which fears censure more than it courts praise. A mind of this class shrinks from making a second effort, from a consciousness of the standard by which it will be tried, and of the comparison to which it will be subjected. He has more to lose and less to gain. The second book must be better than the first, in order to be considered as good ; as the son of a great man must be a greater man than his father, to be esteemed equal to him. Mr. Prescott shows himself to be possessed of a mind of manly temper, in thus submitting to the judgment of the public a new work of essentially the same character as that which has given him so high a rank among the historians of the age. He has not been content to slumber upon his laurels, but has been toiling in those fields of research in which new ones are to be gathered, with as much ardor and industry as if his first crown were yet to be won. We are glad to see, that, in his case, the "noble rage" of the scholar is not chilled by the morbid fear of putting in peril the reputation which has been already gained, and that he does not let his armor rust ingloriously on the wall, because he has gained one victory.

The brilliant success of the "History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella," and the high excellences of matter and style by which that success is vindicated, are sources of just pride to Mr. Prescott's countrymen. When that work was noticed in our Journal, it was spoken of as the production of a "scholar heretofore unheard-of in the world of letters;" and now, in the space of five years, it has become a world-renowned book. It rose, at once, with no doubtful pause or anxious suspense, but at a single bound, to the highest point of public favor, and there it has calmly rested and is likely to rest. Besides numerous editions in America and England, it has been republished in Paris, translated into German under the superintendence of the celebrated historian Von Raumer, also into Italian, and twice into Spanish. The two Spanish translations are now in the course of publication. It has taken the rank of a classic in our language, and in the emulous favor with which it has been received on each side of the Atlantic may be read an assurance of the unbiased judgment of posterity.

It was an element in the success of this elaborate and finished history, that it took the world by surprise. No previous efforts had heralded its way, and told the public what they might expect. We may apply, without exaggeration, to its author what Byron said of himself; that he awoke one morning and found himself famous. It has been Mr. Prescott's good fortune, that the patient temper of his mind has been in harmonious relation with the circumstances of his position. No restless impatience of spirit has disturbed the tranquil progress of his researches, and no stern necessity has compelled him to present their results in a crude and imperfect state. He fixed his eye upon a distant point; to this he took the instant way, and approached it steadily, though slowly, allowing nothing to divert him to the right hand or the left. He was willing to bide his time; and while others were winning name and praise by cheaper efforts, he wrought in tranquil silence, disturbed by no feverish appetite for ephemeral notoriety, till the hour came when the last touches had been given to his work, and he could dismiss it from his hands with the calm assurance, that, whatever might be its fate, he had at least labored conscientiously to make it worthy of success. His history was the finished result of long years of golden leisure, wisely em-

ployed ; of patient reflection and indefatigable study, devoted to one object. It was the natural growth of the author's mind, with the healthy sap of life circulating through it ; and not one of those rickety manufactures which betray at a glance the haste with which they have been put together at the bidding of some contracting publisher, whose favor is bread and whose frown is want. In one moment, the ample harvest of all his industry and all his patience was secured, and the long accumulating arrears of fame were discharged by the rich shower of "golden opinions" which was poured into his lap.

The subject of the present work, the conquest of Mexico by the Spaniards, is deficient in moral grandeur and interest. We read the narrative with far different feelings from those with which we follow the changing events of a struggle like that of the revolt of the Netherlands, or our own Revolution, in which the noblest endowments of mind and the highest qualities of character are displayed in asserting and maintaining a great and vital principle. There is nothing here that kindles the cheek and suffuses the eye with a proud sense of the divine elements which were mingled with the dust from which man was formed. It is a tale of blood and horror. It is the melancholy record of an exterminating war, waged against an unoffending people, with robber-like rapacity and ruffian cruelty, in which the superior advantages of civilization, science, and discipline are found linked with the lowest and basest of passions, and all our sympathies are enlisted in behalf of the heathen and the savage. As a historical theme, it is in some respects obviously inferior to the reign of Ferdinand and Isabella, with which it is so naturally connected, as a progressive step in the increase of that vast colonial empire, the foundations of which were laid by the genius of Columbus. We no longer observe, from the historian's point of view, the stately march of European history and politics, the growth of modern government and civilization, and the successive events by which Providence has been for centuries educating the great human family. The stage is contracted, and the actors have less of port and majesty. The page does not sparkle with names which bring with them long trains of association, nor does the canvass glow with such life-like portraits of men illustri-

ous in the arts of war and peace. Cortés, the prominent figure in the group, may be esteemed a fair equivalent for the "Great Captain"; for, though they are not comparable in the splendor of their achievements, and still less in the scale on which their military enterprises were conducted, yet in all the essential qualities of a leader of armies, in valor, in patience, in fertility of resources, in coolness in the hour of danger, in provident forecast, in consistent firmness of discipline, and in the power of animating his soldiers with his own indomitable spirit, the Conqueror of Mexico need not shrink from a parallel. But we miss the lovely image of Isabella, the wise sovereign, the devoted wife, the affectionate mother, the warm-hearted woman, adorning a throne with those qualities of mind and character which would have shone with cheering lustre in the humblest station, and made her children, had they been born to daily toil, "rise up and call her blessed." No character supplies the place of the wary and sagacious Ferdinand, always commanding our respect, if he seldom inspires a warmer sentiment; or of the romantic and imaginative Columbus, perhaps, of all men, who have been so great in action, the most remarkable for that fervid temperament of genius which is essential to the highest success in literature. Still less can we find any type of that extraordinary man, Cardinal Ximenes, who united in his own person powers so various and so opposite; a scholar, as if he had dreamed away his years in some studious cell, with his elbow upon his desk; a statesman, as if he had breathed all his life the air of the cabinet; a soldier, as if his only training had been that of arms; with no touch of weakness, and free from every vice except pride; with a frame of adamant and a brain whose fibres never relaxed or grew weary, a capacity that foresaw all things, comprehended all things, and accomplished all things, and a fiery energy of will, before which obstacles vanished like chaff before the wind, and opposition melted away like walls of mists in the sun.

Still, the subject has attractive elements peculiar to itself. As a poetical and picturesque theme, stimulating the fancy and filling the mind with vivid and distinct images, it can hardly be surpassed. It carries us into a new and strange world, inhabited by a peculiar people, where all the institutions and habits of life are novel, and where the productive energy of nature itself is manifested in forms of unaccus-

tomed beauty and grandeur. The whole scene is illumined by the last dying gleams of chivalry. The wild courage and reckless spirit of adventure of the knight-errant were displayed, in their full force, by those swarthy soldiers who planted the standard of Spain upon the soil of Mexico. The enterprise was one of the last manifestations of the age of the hand, as distinguished from the age of the head ; of an age in which battles were decided by the personal prowess of a few champions, before war had become a succession of scientific combinations. The contest was between civilization and barbarism, between the steady and deliberate valor of disciplined troops and the impetuous daring of savage masses, — in which the result was as inevitable as in the shock between the vessel of iron and the vessel of clay ; and the conflict of these opposite forces affords constant opportunities for glowing narrative and picturesque description.

The wonderful character of the country itself, which was the prize in this contest, furnishes a brilliant accompaniment, in perfect keeping with the story. The scene is in unison with the actors and the events. The external features of Mexico, its extensive central plain, elevated so high, and with slopes on each side so steep and abrupt, its snow-covered volcanoes, the splendor and variety of its tropical vegetation, the strange animals which inhabited its soil, and the birds of novel and dazzling plumage which wantoned in its brilliant sunshine, its diversity of climate, the rare beauty of its flowers, and the luscious flavor of its fruits, — all are powerfully stimulating to the imagination, and in harmony with the romantic incidents which it is the historian's duty to record. The character of the native population, their inconsistent civilization, the contrast between the superstitions which degraded and enslaved their minds and their general intelligence and progress in science and art, between their habitual gentleness and the bloody ferocity of their religious observances, are also fruitful in the elements of the poetical and the picturesque, and enable the writer to throw the charm of fiction over his pages, while adhering scrupulously to the unvarnished truth.

A subject so attractive has not been hitherto untouched. It has occupied the pens of two writers in English. The narrative of the conquest of Mexico fills about two hundred pages of Robertson's extended work on the history

of America. It is written in that carefully balanced and somewhat formal style which is characteristic of this historian, and is strongly marked by that tendency to generalization which is observable in all his writings. But the plan of a work so extensive admitted of no minuteness of detail, and the pages which he has devoted to this subject form rather an entertaining and well-written sketch than an elaborate history. Patient and exhausting research was not congenial to Dr. Robertson's habits of mind, and his historical works are more remarkable for sound judgment, skillful and luminous arrangement, studied beauty of style and distinctness of narrative, than for minute accuracy and profound knowledge. Succeeding inquirers in the same field of research often find themselves called upon to make energetic protests against the statements and opinions to which his flowing and full-dressed periods have given such wide circulation. Southey, with much injustice, applies to him his own remark upon Solis, that he knows no author in any language whose literary reputation so much surpasses his just claims ; and Dr. Dunham, in his "History of Spain and Portugal," treats him with a caustic severity unbecoming when applied to a man so distinguished in literature and so eminently respectable in private life. Besides, whatever had been Dr. Robertson's plan, and however conscientiously he might have labored in his inquiries and researches, the imperfect materials at that time within his power would have made it impossible for him to treat the subject in a manner to satisfy the requisitions of the present age. As is well known, he complains that he was denied access to some of the most important public repositories in Spain, the treasures of all of which have been generously opened to Mr. Prescott. Upon the subject of the Mexican civilization, the knowledge of his time was extremely imperfect, compared with that which we possess. Humboldt had not poured upon the subject the light of his luminous and comprehensive genius. The works of Veytia, Sahagun, and Boturini slumbered in inaccessible manuscripts ; those of Ixtlilxochitl have never been printed, and were unknown to Robertson ; Gama had not written upon the Aztec chronology and astronomy ; and the splendid pictorial works, which have recently been published, had not addressed their evidence to the eye, in such characters that he who runs may read. The cautious and skeptical

spirit in which he wrote, and which was warranted by the few facts which were within his knowledge, would now be esteemed as indicating an incredulity amounting (as Mrs. Thrale said Dr. Johnson's did) to disease.

Another work on this subject, forming one small volume, was written for "Constable's Miscellany," by Don Telesforo de Trueba y Cosio. He was a Spaniard, who lived many years in London, wrote some respectable novels on Spanish subjects, and died about ten years since in Paris. His work is written in English remarkably good for a foreigner, but the style has no grace or attraction; and, as a literary effort, it is a mere bookseller's job, the facts being borrowed from the most obvious sources, especially from Robertson.

The Spaniards have one good history of the Conquest, — in some respects, their best history. It is written by Don Antonio de Solis, and holds the rank of a classic in the language. He was a cultivated scholar, and endowed with a poetical genius of no mean order; and the attractive qualities of his style, and a charm of manner not common among the historians of his country, have given his work a place in Spanish literature somewhat higher than its substantial merits justify. He shows the skill of a practised writer in the distribution of his subject and the arrangement of his materials, and the narrative is colored throughout with the warm hues of a poetical fancy. The rules of proportion and perspective are carefully observed, the subordinate parts are never allowed to assume an undue prominence, and the connexion between the several portions of the story is skilfully maintained. The style is finished and elaborate, betraying a close study and evident imitation of the Latin historians, and, though criticized by some foreigners, has received the uniform commendation of his own countrymen, who are alone qualified to pronounce an opinion. But in those essential qualities which make a history valuable to the student and the inquirer, its merits are not so high. He was neither a profound thinker nor a laborious student, and spent much more time upon the form than the substance of his work. He does not weigh with critical sagacity the value of authorities, and seems rather in search of what is rhetorically effective than of what is true. His custom of introducing set speeches into the mouths of his personages, though sanctioned

by the practice of antiquity and by some respectable names among modern historians, is offensive to the taste of the present age, produces something like stage effect, and casts "ominous conjectures" upon the accuracy of his narrative. His pages, too, are darkened by the most extravagant fanaticism, and he is equally disloyal to truth in the encomiums which he lavishes upon the Christian conquerors, and in the dark colors in which he has painted their heathen victims. The portrait of Cortés he has drawn without shadow; studiously exalting his merits and concealing his errors, the result is an ideal hero, such as his countrymen could have wished him to be, not such as he was. His history, in spite of its defects, has had great success. It has been printed and reprinted in the original, both in Spain and out of it, with various degrees of typographical elegance, and translated into the principal languages of Europe. The literary character of Solís is discussed by Mr. Prescott in a long and elaborate note, admirable for its just discrimination and beauty of style, to which we are indebted for the substance of the foregoing remarks.

In the studies and researches into which Mr. Prescott was led, while writing his "History of the Reign of Ferdinand and Isabella," his attention was naturally directed to the kindred and collateral subject of the conquest of Mexico; and a little observation and inquiry satisfied him, that there were in existence, in print and in manuscript, the materials for a much more thorough and accurate history of this event than had hitherto appeared in any language. Having formed the plan of writing the work, he found that the facilities which would be extended to him, in the collection of manuscript authorities and original documentary evidence, were such as to exceed his most sanguine expectations. The result of his own exertions, and those of his friends and correspondents, (few men seem to be more rich in friends), was an accumulation of manuscript materials, far exceeding in amount and value those which had been within the reach of any previous historian.

These materials have been chiefly derived from three collections. The first was made by Don Juan Baptista Muñoz, the well known historiographer of Castile. This is a distinct office, with a salary attached to it. He employed upwards of thirty years in making a collection of documents

illustrating the whole colonial history of Spain in this quarter of the globe. In this task, he labored with indefatigable industry, with a zeal that no obstacles could chill, and a patient assiduity that shrunk from no amount of toil, however exhausting. It was an employment congenial to his taste, and he pursued it with that intense devotion which belongs only to a labor of love. By royal command, every repository was thrown open to him ; the archives of cities and towns, in the Old and the New World, were ransacked by him ; he explored the dark recesses of convent libraries, and disturbed the dust of generations which had settled upon their shelves ; the great national collections of Seville and Simancas opened to him their treasures. Manuscripts mouldy with age were rescued from the devouring jaws of time and brought forth into the light of day, to give their testimony to the past. So patient of labor was he, that he transcribed with his own hand the manuscript of Sahagun's history, forming two bulky volumes in folio, and made a similar transcript of the printed account of Grijalva's expedition by his chaplain, because the book had become so exceedingly rare, that he feared the entire destruction of every existing copy by some of those many casualties that books are heirs to. The result of his labors and researches was an enormous mass of documents, consisting of letters, ordinances, chronicles, journals, and official reports. Of this collection he did not live to reap the benefit himself. Death arrested his labors when he had completed one volume of his great work, which contains an account of a portion of the discoveries of Columbus.

A second collection was made by Don Vargas Ponce, president of the Academy of History. His manuscripts were chiefly drawn from the archives at Seville, a rich and extensive repository of official documents. He died, too, before he had had time to avail himself of the fruits of his own researches ; and both his manuscripts and those of Muñoz are preserved in the archives of the Royal Academy of History at Madrid, which is intrusted by government with a particular supervision of the colonial history.

A third collection was made by Navarrete, the present president of the Academy, well known as the author of an excellent life of Cervantes, and who is still living in Madrid, in a green old age, universally respected and beloved for his

learning, his talents, his estimable character, and amiable manners. He went over the same ground, gleaned what his predecessors had left, and making many important additions for his own private collection. About twenty years ago, he commenced the publication of the various documents in his possession and that of the Academy. The work is called "*Coleccion de los Viages y Descubrimientos de los Españoles.*" The first two volumes are devoted to the life and voyages of Columbus, and in consequence of their publication, Mr. Irving went from London to Madrid to avail himself of these new materials to write the life of the Great Admiral. A third volume, afterwards printed, gives the voyages of the inferior discoverers, as Vespucci, Balboa, and others, who followed in the track of Columbus, and supplied Mr. Irving with the materials for his "*Companions of Columbus.*" Instead of going on, as he had originally proposed, with the publication of the documents illustrating the conquests of Peru and Mexico, Navarrete, in the succeeding volumes, turned aside to the discovery of the Moluccas and the voyages in the East. The troubled state of affairs in Spain prevented the continuation of this excellent undertaking, and the publication was accordingly suspended.

The application which Mr. Prescott made to the Academy for permission to copy that part of their inestimable collection, which related to Mexico and Peru, was received by them in a manner which showed their consciousness, that the admirable work which he had already written, upon one of the most brilliant periods in the annals of Spain, had created a debt of gratitude on the part of the scholars of that country, which they felt a lively desire to repay. After choosing him a member of their body, they appointed one of their own number, a distinguished German scholar resident in Madrid, to superintend the copying of all the materials in their possession. In a similar spirit of generous courtesy, Navarrete, their president, allowed him the free use of his own private collection, the fruits of a long life of accumulation.

From all these various sources, a mass of unpublished documents was obtained, relating to the conquest and settlement of Mexico and Peru, comprising altogether about eight thousand folio pages, varying, of course, in authority and interest, but none without some value, and many of the

highest importance. It is a curious subject of reflection, that two Spanish scholars, armed with all the authority of government, had thus been employed for half a century in gathering materials for the use of a writer, living in a distant portion of the globe, to whom they were not bound by ties either of religion, language, or blood. A shade of melancholy, too, passes over the mind in remembering, that they were not permitted to reap the fruits of their own labors, and to shape their ample materials into a fair edifice of literary fame. It was for others to gather where they had sown. The law of Providence, which Virgil has embodied in his well-known lines, which dooms the bee, the bird, and the ox to toil for others, and not for themselves, is perpetually applied in the history of literary enterprises. The materials are slowly gathered, the plan is sketched, years of patient inquiry and reflection are devoted to preliminary preparation, and when the projected work is beginning to assume distinct proportions in the scholar's mind, when the creative spirit of genius is proceeding to arrange the confused mass into order and beauty, when the heart beats high with anticipated success, and the laurel seems already within the grasp,

" Comes the blind Fury, with the abhorred shears,
And slits the thin-spun life."

All, too, who take pleasure in seeing the decline of exclusiveness and intolerance, and the removal of those walls of division which separate nations from each other, will be gratified with the courteous and liberal spirit manifested by the Spanish Academy, which shows, that, even in that part of Europe which is the least progressive in its movement, a decided advance has been made in generous feeling and elevated sentiment since the days of Robertson.

Mr. Prescott did not rest here in his accumulation of unpublished materials. From the Duke of Monteleone, a Sicilian nobleman, the descendant and representative of Cortés, who courteously opened to him the archives of his family, were obtained some interesting manuscripts of a personal nature, illustrating the biography of that renowned adventurer. After these details, it will be hardly necessary to add, that he provided himself with every printed work which had reference to the subject, including the splendid publications of Dupaix and Lord Kingsborough, which, from their

colossal dimensions and costly character, are not often found in private libraries.

As the events, which Mr. Prescott was called upon to record, took place in a country and among a people whose usages and institutions were unlike those of any other, his first step was to transport the reader to the period of the Conquest, and to paint the scene of the enterprise as it appeared to the Spaniards upon their landing and during their progress. This he has done with singular judgment, taste, and sagacity in his Introduction, of about two hundred pages, devoted to a consideration of the Mexican, or, more properly speaking, Aztec civilization. This portion of the work, embodying, as it does, the results of careful reflection and exhausting research, will require to be read with more concentrated attention than the narrative of the Conquest ; but it will richly repay all the time which may be devoted to it. It contains a summary and abstract of many elaborate works neither accessible nor attractive to the general reader, written in a style of transparent beauty and simplicity, and pervaded by a sound judgment equally removed from the extremes of credulity and skepticism. We read in it, with melancholy interest, the tale of the flourishing fortunes and palmy prosperity of a race, now humbled to the dust by long years of subjection, and with every spark of manly feeling trampled out by the iron heel of their oppressors.

When the Spaniards landed upon the shores of Mexico, they found themselves in a new world. The singular physical features of the country prepared them for strange revelations, and at every step their anticipations were confirmed. The forms of animal life, which they observed, everywhere suggested resemblances to those of the European world, but nowhere presented an exact parallel. In the productions of the vegetable kingdom, the discrepancy was still more marked. The exhaustless wealth of a tropical soil lavished itself in the grandest and most fantastic shapes ; in trees of giant size and luxuriant foliage ; in a tangled undergrowth of shrubbery ; in a variety of climbing plants, that threw their green arches over the open spaces of the forest, or hung in pendulous grace from the highest branches ; and in flowers of vivid hues, whose intoxicating perfume was flung upon the air for many a league. It was a vision of fairy land made real. The old world which they had left seemed tame, languid, and

cold, compared with that upon whose teeming soil they saw the evidence of such undecayed and exuberant energies. The air was clearer ; the sun was brighter, the stars seemed nearer to the earth ; every thing was steeped in a more passionate beauty, and wore the glory and freshness of early youth.

The lord of this favored region was marked by peculiarities of appearance and organization which made him, as compared with the "*homo sapiens Europæus*," another, yet the same. In his form and limbs, there was more of feminine delicacy and roundness than of masculine vigor ; he was more suited to exercises of agility than of strength ; active rather than muscular. The hair was black, coarse, glossy, and straight ; the beard thin and usually plucked out ; the complexion of a reddish brown or copper color ; the cheek-bones high, and the eyes obliquely directed towards the temples ; the expression of the countenance soft, with a tinge of melancholy. In vital energy, power of endurance, and strength of muscle, he was inferior to the European, and a proportionately less quantity of food sufficed for his sustenance.

In social life, manners and customs, civil polity, and religious belief, there were also striking peculiarities. The Aztec race had reached a point in civilization very far beyond that attained by the wandering tribes of the North. Their political organization presented all the elements of a well-defined state. The government was an elective monarchy, and the sovereign was selected from the brothers of the deceased monarch, and, in default of these, from his nephews. The king exercised both legislative and executive functions, and was aided in his duties by a sort of privy council of nobles. There was a numerous body of nobility, bound to the crown by ties of dependence, which had some elements in common with the feudal system. In the organization of the judicial department, the results of wisdom and experience were conspicuous. The judges of the higher courts were appointed by the crown ; those of the inferior tribunals were chosen by the people. The superior judges were independent of the crown, and held their offices for life. In criminal cases, an appeal lay from the inferior to the higher tribunal ; but not in civil. A wise solicitude was felt for the rights both of property and of person, and the purity of the judicial office was guarded by severe penalties. Laws were registered and promulgated by means of hieroglyphical

paintings. Their penal code was sanguinary, like that of most semi-civilized nations ; all the great crimes against society being made capital. Marriage was celebrated with as much formality as in Christian countries. A separate tribunal was instituted for the sole purpose of determining questions relating to it, and a divorce could not be obtained, until authorized by a sentence of this court. The splendor of the crown was maintained, and the expenses of the state defrayed, by a regular system of taxes and revenues. These and many other details, which our limits will not permit us to give, show a civil polity which must have been the growth of the accumulated wisdom of many generations, and those elements of order, dependence, and stability, which distinguish a nation from a tribe.

In the arts which minister to the comforts and convenience of social life, they had also made great progress. They tilled the earth with judgment and skill. Their knowledge of architecture was attested by imposing edifices of stone and brick, ornamented with sculptured decorations and bas-reliefs. They displayed ingenuity and taste in various kinds of manufactures. They made utensils of earthen ware for the ordinary purposes of domestic life, and cups and vases of lackered or painted wood, impervious to wet and richly colored. Their dyes were obtained from both vegetable and mineral substances. They wrought in gold, silver, and precious stones with so much skill and delicacy of workmanship, that the Spanish goldsmiths admitted their own inferiority. But the art in which they particularly excelled was feather-work, with which they produced the effect of the most beautiful mosaic or tapestry. The dazzling plumage of tropical birds was wrought into dresses for their nobility, hangings for apartments, and ornaments for the temples. The specimens of this species of manufacture which were sent to Europe awakened the highest admiration.

In social life and domestic manners, there was no inconsiderable degree of polish and refinement. Their fine climate and fertile soil created a taste for pleasurable sensations, and provided them with the means of gratifying it. In one important respect they will sustain a favorable comparison with nations advanced beyond them in general social progress, and that is in the consideration paid to women, and in the delicacy and tenderness with which they were treated.

The Aztec woman was exempted from the severe toil imposed upon the female sex among all the other Indian races in North America, and only such light labors were exacted of her as were suited to her strength. She shared the confidence of her husband, and was not excluded from his hours of social relaxation. She was his companion, and not his slave. The obligations of the marriage vow were mutually recognized. Their daily life had not the sullen monotony of the more northern races, but was sweetened by those unbought attentions and spontaneous courtesies, which throw their charm over the social intercourse of a civilized community. The sympathizing heart of the Aztec felt it to be a privilege to express by visits of congratulation, and by presents, his pleasure in the happiness of his friends, as on occasion of a marriage, or the birth of a child. Their social entertainments were tasteful and elegant. They had a taste for the pleasures of the table, and in the science of cookery were no mean proficient. Their meats were dressed with various sauces, were accompanied with a profusion of vegetables and fruits, and the more delicate luxuries of pastry and confectionary. After a sumptuous dinner, the Aztec *gourmand* refreshed himself with a cup of chocolate flavored with vanilla, and aided the process of digestion by smoking a pipe or a cigar. The table of Montezuma was spread with imperial magnificence, though he had the bad taste to take his meals alone. Fish, which cannot now be obtained at any price in the city of Mexico, were frequently served up at his board, which, the day before, had been swimming in the Gulf of Mexico, two hundred miles distant. The Aztecs were remarkable for a passionate love of flowers; a taste which they have transmitted to their degenerate and degraded descendants, and which is so generally the accompaniment of a kindly and gentle nature. They decorated their persons with them; their hues and odors heightened the charm of their entertainments, and were blended with their religious observances.

In scientific culture, they had made remarkable progress. By their peculiar and ingenious system of picture-writing, they were furnished with a tolerable substitute for alphabetical signs, and enabled to transport intelligence to distant points, to publish laws and edicts, and to record and hand down to posterity the memorable public and private events

of their annals. They had devised a serviceable and sufficiently simple system of notation in their arithmetic. In the measurement of time, they displayed an astonishing precision, and their astronomical attainments were so extraordinary, so disproportioned to their progress in other intellectual departments, that nothing but an overwhelming amount of evidence would win our belief to the statements which we read. That the Mexicans had solved with more precision than any European nation the nice problem of adjusting the civil by the solar year, and had entirely escaped the error which was rectified by the Gregorian reform in the calendar, is a fact of startling interest, which suggests inquiries and reflections that seek in vain for solution and repose.

The religious faith of every people is a subject of interest to an inquiring mind ; and the more isolated a nation has been, and the less influenced by the opinions and practice of others, the more interesting are the efforts they make to explain the mysteries which surround them, and to answer those perplexing questions which arise in the breast of the natural man with the dawn of intelligence. The religion of the Aztecs was so closely blended with their civil polity, that the latter can hardly be comprehended without a knowledge of the former. The church was with them a distinct institution, wielding great power, and possessing great influence. The sacerdotal order was very numerous ; as may be inferred from one fact, that five thousand priests were attached, in some way or other, to the principal temple in the capital. The priests were allowed to marry ; they did not live apart in monastic seclusion, but shared in the duties and responsibilities of life. The education of the young was, in particular, intrusted to them. The girls were given to the care of priestesses, for women were allowed to exercise all sacerdotal functions except those of sacrifice. To each of the principal temples, lands were annexed for the maintenance of the priests, which, augmented by the policy or devotion of successive princes, had become extensive and valuable at the time of the Conquest. The religious order was also enriched with the first-fruits, and with the voluntary offerings, always considerable, of sincere piety and timid superstition. It was their duty to distribute in alms to the poor all that was not required for their own support. As Mr. Prescott justly remarks, there is a striking resemblance,

not merely in a few empty forms, but in the whole way of life, between the Mexican and Egyptian priesthood.

The religious system of the Aztecs was marked by singular incongruities, and naturally suggests the idea of two distinct sources, and that they had engrafted their own belief upon the purer faith of some elder race of higher culture. They recognized the existence of a Supreme Creator and Lord of the universe, of whose character and attributes they had no unworthy conceptions ; but a crowd of inferior deities presided over the elements, the changes of the seasons, and the various occupations of man. Their faith comprehended a future state of rewards and punishments, more refined in its character than that of the ancient Greeks or modern Mahometans. In their religious observances, as well as in their doctrines of belief, we recognize some singular coincidences with both Judaism and Christianity. The naming of children was accompanied with a ceremony closely resembling that of baptism. The head and lips of the infant were touched with water, and a prayer was offered, "that the sin which was given to us before the beginning of the world, might not visit the child, but that, cleansed by these waters, it might live and be born anew." The Catholic ecclesiastics saw with astonishment the rites of confession and absolution administered by their priests. Their traditionary accounts of the Deluge resembled, not only in the general outline, but in the particular details, the narrative of the same event as recorded by Moses ; and in the goddess Cioacoatl, "the serpent woman," "who bequeathed the sufferings of child-birth to women as the tribute of death," "by whom sin came into the world," may be traced an affinity, more than fanciful, with the Eve of the Hebrew Scriptures. The cross, too, was an object of worship in the Mexican temples, and one of their religious rites strikingly resembled the Christian Communion. Some of their religious precepts breathe the lofty morality of the New Testament. What mind is not startled at the remarkable coincidence contained in the declaration which is found among them, that "he who looks too curiously upon a woman commits adultery with his eyes" ? The effect of these resemblances upon the heated minds of the Catholic ecclesiastics, the fanciful conjectures to which they gave birth, and the extent to which the parallel between their own faith and observances and

those of the Aztecs was pushed by them, will not excite our surprise. Such striking coincidences, too, will inspire us with some charity for Lord Kingsborough, an English nobleman, who, in our own times, has lavished a world of curious learning, and reasoning powers of no mean order, in support of the proposition, that Mexico was colonized by the Israelites ; and who records, as his deliberate conviction, " that the Aztecs had a clear knowledge of the Old Testament, and most probably of the New, though somewhat corrupted by time and hieroglyphics " !

The sketch here given of the religious creed and observances of the Aztecs presents the fair side of the picture. The dark side cannot be contemplated without a shudder of horror. Among this people, to whom belonged so considerable a share of knowledge, civilization, and refinement, whose religion embraced so much that was pure and elevating, the practice of human sacrifices prevailed to an extent, compared with which, history has nowhere else recorded any thing that approaches to a parallel. The altars of their deities dripped with human blood. The fiercest superstitions of the Old World, — the dismal rites performed around the " furnace blue " of Moloch,

" horrid king, besmeared with blood
Of human sacrifice and parents' tears," —

are but faint types of the hideous abominations which were enacted in honor of the Mexican divinities. The bloody knife of the priest was never idle, and the steam of carnage was always fresh in the nostrils of their sullen gods. The number of human victims annually sacrificed to this merciless superstition throughout the empire is variously estimated at from twenty to fifty thousand. The necessity of providing victims for these sacrifices became a prominent motive for commencing or continuing wars. Hence, an enemy was never slain in battle, if there were a chance of taking him alive ; a circumstance to which the Spaniards repeatedly owed their preservation. Nor is the worst yet told. That practice, from which the first instincts of our nature so strongly recoil, which we associate only with humanity in its lowest and most degraded forms, and which supposes the principle of humanity almost blotted out in him who indulges in it, — the practice of cannibalism, — prevailed among them,

not as the gratification of a brutish appetite, but sanctioned by religion, and mingling itself with the graces and amenities of social life. They feasted upon human flesh, not at coarse repasts like those of naked savages, snatching from the embers the quivering limbs of enemies slain in battle, but at elaborate banquets, where the appetite was stimulated and the senses gratified by all the means and appliances of civilization ; by delicate meats, by delicious fruits, by dishes of gold and silver, by garlands of flowers, by soft music and graceful dances. These hideous and loathsome usages, prevalent among a people with so many claims to the character of a civilized community, present one of the most singular anomalies that history has recorded, for which we seek in vain for any sufficient explanation, and which must ever remain as one of those perplexing facts that baffle the learned and confound the wise.

The Aztec civilization is seen in its highest form and most complete development among the Tezcucans, one of the kindred and allied races which were in possession of the valley of Mexico at the time of the Conquest. Every reader, who feels an interest in the fate and fortunes of humanity, will be grateful to Mr. Prescott for the sketch which he has given, in the sixth chapter of his Introduction, of the golden age of this people ; of their wealth, their power, their scientific and literary culture, and their social refinement ; of the romantic fortunes and splendid career of their greatest monarch, Nezahualcoyotl, whose varied adventures are fruitful in themes for poetry, could any metre be devised sufficiently comprehensive and elastic to embrace his "dissonant consonant name," and were life long enough to admit of its frequent repetition. In his early perils and misfortunes, his subsequent renown and prosperity, his poetical genius, and the great crime which stains his memory, he presents a striking parallel to the monarch minstrel of the Jews. It is curious to observe, in the specimens of his poetry that have come down to us, the same law of the human mind which led a kindred spirit, in another age and country, to exclaim, "Vanity of vanities ! all is vanity !" that law, by virtue of which, the aspirations and desires of a finely organized nature keep ever in advance of the gifts and flatteries of Fortune ; which, in the palmy state of glory and success, where there is no more room for hope or fear,

suggests most vividly the thought of the instability of all human good, the frail tenure upon which earthly possessions are held, the emptiness of fame, the worthlessness of wealth, the shadowy and unsatisfying character of all that prosperity pours into the lap. The strains of the royal minstrel of Tezcucó are set upon the minor key. The luxuriance of a tropical imagination is tempered with a vein of gentle melancholy, and with a dash of that Epicurean philosophy which seeks in the joys of the present a relief from those gloomy forebodings which throw their dark shadows over the future. In the delicious solitudes of his rural palace, lulled by the sound of falling waters and fanned by gales of balm, he gave utterance to the vague sense of languid discontent in solemn and pathetic hymns, marked both by dignity of sentiment and beauty of illustration. In reading Mr. Prescott's very interesting account of this remarkable monarch, of his wisdom, his valor, his powers of action and of thought, his kindness of nature, and his many virtues, we cannot but be struck with the caprice of fortune, which has allowed the rust of oblivion to gather upon his name and memory, while those of inferior mark shine with such undimmed lustre, through the gloom of the past. To most persons, the very existence of this wise, powerful, and gifted monarch will probably be a new revelation. So much more does fame depend upon the reporter than upon the deed ! To the accident of a Homer we owe it, that the name of Agamemnon is so familiar a sound, and Miltiades is mainly indebted to Herodotus, that the lapse of so many centuries has not withered one leaf of his laurels. But the shade of the Tezcucan monarch may now repose in peace. The hour and the man have at last come, that are to disperse the dark oblivious clouds that have so long hidden his name from the general eye. His virtues and genius are now embalmed in the beautiful periods of a book which the world will not let die. He may find a compensation for having waited so long, in the full blaze of reflected light now thrown upon his memory by the fame and talents of his historian.

Mr. Prescott has appended to his work a dissertation on the interesting and perplexing question of the origin of Mexican civilization. It is written in a cautious spirit, and the conclusion he arrives at is something like that of Dr. Johnson's *Rasselas*, "in which nothing is concluded." This

we say not by way of censure, but of commendation. This is preëminently one of those subjects upon which half knowledge is bold, and assured knowledge is diffident. Mr. Prescott did not start with a theory, and in his progress accept whatever confirmed it, and reject every thing inconsistent with it. His object was to state the case fairly ; to present in a popular form the result of all that had been written upon the subject ; to discriminate between the fanciful and the sober ; and to advance no conclusion to which he had not arrived by a legitimate process of inquiry and reflection. The reader who follows him through his preliminary observations, when he comes to the final summing up, will admit, that this is all which can be stated as matter of certainty, and that a single step further carries us from the firm earth of reality into the cloudland of conjecture. It is one of those mysterious questions, which, from the insuperable difficulties they present, administer a tacit rebuke to the pride of human intellect, by the bounds which they set to its progress, presenting depths which it cannot fathom and heights which it cannot scale. Whence came those races which passed in successive waves over the elevated plains of Mexico, and dwelt in the sunny regions of Central America ? What was the origin of that peculiar civilization, of which such authentic accounts are preserved to us, and which has left its visible memorials in the stupendous structures of Palenque and Uxmal ? Was it of exotic or indigenous growth ? If the former, how are we to account for the singular discrepancies between it and every form of European or Asiatic civilization with which we are acquainted ? If the latter, how are we to explain the striking resemblances, and how came the frightful elements of human sacrifice and cannibalism to be mingled with so much of intellectual culture and social refinement ? How many centuries are looking down upon us from those nodding ruins which the enterprise of one of our own countrymen has recently made familiar to us ? Were they the work of the same people who were in possession of the country when it was discovered by Europeans, or of another and higher race which had passed away and been lost in the night of ages ? All these questions press in vain for a satisfactory answer upon the mind lost in wandering mazes which find no end. The comprehensive glance of the philosophic historian, the

minute diligence of the pains-taking antiquary, the practical sagacity of the observing traveller are alike perplexed and baffled.

The Introduction and the Appendix, though separated by the entire narrative of the Conquest, form parts of the same subject. We commend the judgment which induced Mr. Prescott to throw his observations upon a point rather speculative than historical into an appendix, though his readers could certainly have had no reason to complain, had he incorporated them into the Introduction, with which they are naturally connected. The Introduction and the Appendix, taken together, comprise rather more than half a volume ; and the value of Mr. Prescott's statements and opinions will be enhanced, and the conscientious spirit in which his investigations have been conducted will be appreciated, by a knowledge of the fact, that to the preparation of this half volume he has devoted the assiduous labor of two years and a half, with facilities and advantages such as no other person now living has at command. He is a bold man who, after this, will undertake to deny his facts or controvert his conclusions ; and even to pronounce upon their correctness involves some spice of assurance.

We cannot take leave of this portion of the work, without again expressing our admiration of the great ability with which it has been executed. It cannot fail to add materially to Mr. Prescott's already distinguished literary reputation, especially as part of it requires those qualities of mind which belong rather to the philosopher than the historian, and which he was not called upon to put forth in his former work so distinctly, though in our age every historian must be more or less of a philosopher. For the investigation of questions of this kind, partly historical and partly speculative, he is very well fitted by his habits of patient industry, his sound judgment, his power of keeping his mind in a state of well-balanced suspense till all the means for coming to a result have been obtained, and that judicial skill in the weighing of testimony to which he has a hereditary claim. He has enough of the poetical temperament to feel the stimulating influence of those romantic elements in which his theme is so fruitful, and to give an appropriate richness and beauty to his style ; yet his imagination never carries him to extravagant theories or wild conjectures, but is always under the wise

control of a dispassionate judgment. The most superficial reader perceives, that he has made himself a perfect master of the subject, and that he writes down upon it from a superior position. His knowledge, patiently acquired and long reflected upon, has become assimilated and blended with the substance of his mind, and is not the crude and half-digested result of a hurried process of cramming. We hail, with pride and pleasure, the accession to the stores of our young and glowing literature of contributions like this ; the work of a manly understanding, applying itself in sincerity and good faith to the investigation of subjects interesting to humanity, and proclaiming its results in a style marked by dignity, simplicity, and grace. These are among the best possessions of a nation ; the most enduring monuments of its glory ; better than the bloody prizes of war or the peaceful gains of skilful diplomacy, — inferior only to that lofty distinction which waits upon moral worth, upon unfaltering adherence to truth, justice, and good faith.

We can have no question, that this portion of the work will prove highly attractive and interesting, even to general readers. The subject is one about which much vague curiosity is felt, but very little is accurately known. Heretofore, there has been no one work, to which reference could be had, containing the results of exhausting research, conveyed in a popular form. The inquirer must have turned over many leaves and consulted many uninviting books, before he could gratify his curiosity. For general use and for the purposes of most scholars, Mr. Prescott's labors have quite superseded those of all other writers ; and the day is far distant, when his will be set aside by ampler knowledge or more felicity in communicating it. Many of his facts and details are quite new, having been drawn from manuscripts, or books almost as rare as manuscripts. The care with which this part of the work has been prepared is perceptible in the style, which, with all his usual ease and grace, has more than his usual finish. It never oversteps the limits of good taste, but is tinged with that rich glow of coloring, so suited to the subject, which kindles the imagination, and almost compels an author to interweave with his sober prose the more vivid hues of poetry. It will doubtless be Mr. Prescott's good fortune to make permanently popular a recondite and abstruse subject, and to put himself in the same

relation to his original authorities, in which Gibbon stands to monkish chroniclers and Byzantine historians.

Mr. Prescott's opinions on the origin of Mexican civilization were formed without reference to Mr. Stephens's publications, the essay which constitutes the Appendix having been prepared three years ago, and being now published as it was then written. The reader who compares this Appendix with the reflections of Mr. Stephens, contained in the closing chapters of his two works, will perceive a coincidence in some of their views. Conclusions formed under such different circumstances, by minds so unlike in their organization, by the student in his library, and the traveller under the sun and stars, certainly corroborate each other. It cannot but be a source of gratification to Mr. Prescott to find the results to which he has come confirmed by so intelligent an observer as Mr. Stephens, whose authority is entitled to much weight, even on speculative points. The latter, it is true, is not a man of learning, but he is, therefore, free from those "peccant humors of learning" which sometimes make the mind of the scholar "dark with excess of light." His strong sense, his sagacity, his shrewdness of observation, combined with the extraordinary opportunities he has enjoyed for personal inspection of the monuments of the Aztec civilization which are yet visible, give him the right to be heard with great respect, even upon questions on which the learned have speculated and the wise have doubted.

It may seem to our readers, that we have occupied a disproportionate space in our observations upon the Introduction and the Appendix, and that, as the narrative of the Conquest and of the subsequent events in the life of Cortés fills nearly two volumes and a half, it will not be possible for us to do equal justice to this, the main part of the work, without transcending the utmost limits allowed to a reviewer by the sufferance of editors and the courtesy of readers. But in dwelling so long upon the preliminary and supplemental matter, we have been influenced by a consideration rather of the novelty and interest of the subjects discussed, than of the comparative space which it occupies; and we feel in some measure justified by the statement which Mr. Prescott makes in his Preface, that the Introduction and Appendix have cost him as much labor, and nearly as much time, as the narrative.

The moment that we land with Cortés upon the shores

of Mexico, we feel ourselves upon comparatively familiar ground. Few events in history are more extensively known, in their general outlines, than the conquest of Mexico. The romantic character of the enterprise itself, and the fact that it has been recorded by the classical pen of so popular a writer as Dr. Robertson, have made it one of those common-places of knowledge, with which every decently educated man is supposed to be acquainted. The names of Cortés and Montezuma are as familiar to the intelligent schoolboy, as those of Alexander and Darius. This is a disadvantage which must have presented itself distinctly to Mr. Prescott's mind, when he selected his subject. Nothing is more difficult than to give an attractive character to a thorough and detailed history of an event, which has been made universally popular by a well-written, though superficial sketch. It is like taking a traveller by slow stages, in an ordinary carriage, over a country through which he has been already whirled with the magic speed of steam. Such a journey can only be made pleasant by contriving that the resting-places shall be in spots interesting from their associations, or charming from their natural beauties of scenery and situation, and which the rapidity of his former mode of travelling compelled him to overlook. A somewhat similar necessity is imposed upon the historian who holds up to the view of the reader a subject in its full size and natural proportions, of which he has before seen a reduced copy in the pages of a skilful compiler. He must make his new matter so attractive, that the reader shall feel no impatience at the deliberate steps and slower movement by which the same point must now be approached. In this respect, Mr. Prescott has been eminently successful. We read with equal interest the minute details which were inconsistent with Dr. Robertson's flowing outline, and the new facts which Mr. Prescott's ampler sources of information have made known to him, and hang with fresh delight upon every page of an expanded narrative, the issue and leading events of which have long been familiar to us.

One of the "primal duties" of a historian is to give the very form and pressure of the time he is describing; to infuse its spirit into his pages; to paint his scenes to the eye as well as to the mind; to produce an effect resembling as nearly as possible the illusion created by seeing the events he narrates

represented by well-trained actors, with appropriate costume, scenery, and decorations. Here, too, Mr. Prescott has been signally successful. His mind is not of that passionless cast which preserves its own cold identity, while recording the most romantic adventures and the most gallant enterprises ; but is sufficiently impressible and sympathetic to become "subdued to what it works in," and to catch a contagious glow from that fiery valor whose brilliant achievements he is called upon to narrate. In his animated pages, we see, as in the mirror of Cornelius Agrippa, the very shape and features of the sixteenth century. He makes us feel the electric influences which the successive discoveries in America propagated through the veins of Europe ; what unbounded fields for enterprise the stirring spirits of the time saw in those unknown regions ; what brilliant fortunes the stout soldier hoped to carve out for himself with his good sword, in that western world of promise ; what golden dreams of untold wealth haunted the feverish slumbers of avarice ; what noontide visions it beheld of El Dorado cities, where the tiles of the houses were of pure gold, and the streets were paved with ingots of silver ; with what zeal the breast of the religious enthusiast glowed, to bring out of the thick darkness of idolatry into the light of the true faith the natives of those benighted lands. He paints to the life those hardy adventurers who landed with Cortés upon the shores of Mexico ; men who seemed to be the peculiar growth of the soil of Spain, and expressly fitted to carry out those great schemes of discovery and conquest which the plans of Providence imposed upon that nation ; men of iron frames and iron resolution, of deliberate valor, patient of hunger and thirst, cheerfully bearing the extremes of heat and cold, insensible to fatigue, conforming themselves to the most rigid discipline, calm in the midst of danger, and vigilant in the midst of security ; men of the same mould and spirit as those from whom the "Great Captain" had formed that terrible Spanish infantry, from whose serried ranks the impetuous chivalry of France had recoiled, in shattered disarray, as the wave is thrown back in foam and spray from the cliffs of an iron-bound coast ; men, too, stained by those vices which form the natural shading to the light of their stern military virtues ; with hearts as hard and as cold as the steel of their swords ; ferociously bigoted, remorselessly cruel, knowing no law but the will of their commander, prodigal, reckless, and dissolute.

With the same vivid pencil he has sketched the grand and beautiful scenery of Mexico, which awakened feelings of admiration even in the rude bosoms of the Spanish soldiers, steeled as they must have been against such soft emotions. We follow the army, step by step, through every part of their eventful progress. We march with them over the dreary sand plains of the coast ; we traverse the luxuriant regions of the *tierra caliente*, glowing with all the splendors of tropical vegetation,—the land of the vanilla, cochineal, cacao, and, in later days, of the orange and the sugar-cane, — where the air is loaded with the fragrance of wild roses and honeysuckles,—where the mocking-bird pours out his “fiery heart” in a tide of song, and the fairy humming-bird rises from the delicate spray as lightly as if the flower itself had suddenly taken wings and flown from its stalk. We commence the gradual ascent which leads up to the table-land of Mexico, and breathe the purer and more bracing air of the *tierra templada*, where the more sober vegetation of the temperate zone begins to be mingled with the brilliant colors and fantastic forms of the tropics, and the aloe, the banana, and the myrtle are interspersed with groves of oak. The route winds round the base of extinct volcanoes, from whose snowy summits the wind sweeps down with piercing coldness. Higher up, we come upon that great central plain, which, at an elevation of seven thousand feet above the sea, stretches along the crests of the Cordilleras, and forms the highest of those natural terraces into which Mexico is distributed. Here the air is mild but invigorating, and the soil teems with a hardy growth of larch, oak, and cypress, now levelled by the merciless axe of the Conquerors, to recall, as it is said, more distinctly the image of those naked plains of Castile, which the force of memory and association had made so dear to them. Lying in the lap of this elevated plain, and encompassed by a towering rampart of rock, we behold the Valley of Mexico, an enchanted region of beauty and fertility, studded with towns and villages, overshadowed with state-ly forests, intermingled with blooming gardens and fields of maize twinkling in the sun, all brought near and presented to the eye in sharp distinctness of outline by the thin mountain air. The central point is occupied by the capital city, “the Venice of the Aztecs,” floating swan-like upon the bosom of the waters, which reflect in softened beauty its towers and temples.

A single extract will be sufficient to show our readers, that we have not expressed too strongly our sense of the vividness and graphic power of Mr. Prescott's descriptions, and the clearness with which he paints a landscape to the eye. It is the passage which describes the first view which the Spaniards had of the Valley of Mexico.

“ The army held on its march through the intricate gorges of the sierra. The route was nearly the same as that pursued at the present day by the courier from the capital to Puebla, by the way of Mecameca. It was not that usually taken by travellers from Vera Cruz, who follow the more circuitous road round the northern base of Iztaccihuatl, as less fatiguing than the other, though inferior in picturesque scenery and romantic points of view. The icy winds, that now swept down the sides of the mountains, brought with them a tempest of arrowy sleet and snow, from which the Christians suffered even more than the Tlascalans, reared from infancy among the wild solitudes of their own native hills. As night came on, their sufferings would have been intolerable, but they luckily found a shelter in the commodious stone buildings which the Mexican government had placed at stated intervals along the roads for the accommodation of the traveller and their own couriers. It little dreamed it was providing a protection for its enemies.

“ The troops, refreshed by a night's rest, succeeded, early on the following day, in gaining the crest of the sierra of Ahualco, which stretches like a curtain between the two great mountains on the north and south. Their progress was now comparatively easy, and they marched forward with a buoyant step, as they felt they were treading the soil of Montezuma.

“ They had not advanced far, when, turning an angle of the sierra, they suddenly came on a view which more than compensated the toils of the preceding day. It was that of the Valley of Mexico, or Tenochtitlan, as more commonly called by the natives ; which, with its picturesque assemblage of water, woodland, and cultivated plains, its shining cities and shadowy hills, was spread out like some gay and gorgeous panorama before them. In the highly rarefied atmosphere of these upper regions, even remote objects have a brilliancy of coloring and a distinctness of outline which seem to annihilate distance. Stretching far away at their feet, were seen noble forests of oak, sycamore, and cedar, and beyond, yellow fields of maize and the towering maguey, intermingled with orchards and blooming gardens ; for flowers, in such demand for their religious festivals, were even more abundant in this populous valley than in other parts of Ana-

huac. In the centre of the great basin were beheld the lakes, occupying then a much larger portion of its surface than at present ; their borders thickly studded with towns and hamlets, and, in the midst, — like some Indian empress with her coronal of pearls, — the fair city of Mexico, with her white towers and pyramidal temples, reposing, as it were, on the bosom of the waters, — the far-famed ‘ Venice of the Aztecs.’ High over all rose the royal hill of Chapultepec, the residence of the Mexican monarchs, crowned with the same grove of gigantic cypresses, which at this day fling their broad shadows over the land. In the distance beyond the blue waters of the lake, and nearly screened by intervening foliage, was seen a shining speck, the rival capital of Tezcucó, and, still further on, the dark belt of porphyry, girdling the Valley around, like a rich setting which Nature had devised for the fairest of her jewels.

“ Such was the beautiful vision which broke on the eyes of the Conquerors. And even now, when so sad a change has come over the scene ; when the stately forests have been laid low, and the soil, unsheltered from the fierce radiance of a tropical sun, is in many places abandoned to sterility ; when the waters have retired, leaving a broad and ghastly margin white with the incrustation of salts, while the cities and hamlets on their borders have mouldered into ruins ; — even now that desolation broods over the landscape, so indestructible are the lines of beauty which Nature has traced on its features, that no traveller, however cold, can gaze on them with any other emotions than those of astonishment and rapture.

“ What, then, must have been the emotions of the Spaniards, when, after working their toilsome way into the upper air, the cloudy tabernacle parted before their eyes, and they beheld these fair scenes in all their pristine magnificence and beauty ! It was like the spectacle which greeted the eyes of Moses from the summit of Pisgah, and, in the warm glow of their feelings, they cried out, ‘ It is the promised land ! ’ ” — Vol. II. pp. 50 – 53.

In the use which Mr. Prescott has made of his various materials, in the apt distribution and symmetrical arrangement of his subject, in his observance of the rules of historical perspective, which give to the objects and figures of the foreground and background their appropriate dimensions, he has shown the same judgment and skill which were so signally displayed in the finished proportions of his history of Ferdinand and Isabella, and which distinguish the historian from the chronicler, the artist from the mechanic. After entering upon the narrative, an obvious difficulty pre-

sented itself in the sickening detail of battles and slaughter, which it became his duty to narrate. The course of the conquering army is everywhere to be tracked by bloody foot-prints. The clash of arms is interrupted only by short breathing-spaces of repose. The eye is wearied with the perpetual gleaming of steel, and the ear vexed with the constant rattle of musketry. Nothing is more tedious and revolting than the record of battles, where no great principle is at issue, where no precious prize is staked upon the result, where nothing is gained to humanity by the blood that is poured out, and where no sublime feeling of self-sacrifice sustains the fainting frame and lights up the dying eye with gleams of triumph. At Marathon or Bunker Hill, we can hang with interest upon every stroke that is dealt, and every shot that is fired, because the course of events and the progress of humanity have invested these contests with a dignity and importance which bear no proportion to the numbers engaged in them ; but what eye can watch, with the same minuteness of observation, the bloody fields of carnage which mark the devastating career of Attila, Tamerlane, or Genghis Khan ? Milton has remarked, and Hume has quoted the remark with approbation, that the wars of the Heptarchy are as little worth recording as the fights of kites or crows.

In the case of the battles fought by the Conquerors of Mexico, this feeling is enhanced by the pitiable odds between the contending parties. Until we come to the capital itself, where the Aztecs fought with the frantic desperation of a wild animal at bay, aided by the peculiar position and construction of the city, which were singularly suited to embarrass the movements of a besieging army, and to enable the inhabitants to act with advantage, there was nothing like a fair contest or an impartial distribution of danger. Their contests are not so much battles as massacres of the weak, the defenceless, and the unarmed by the strong and the armed, in which the work of death is only arrested by sheer weariness of muscle, and the sword is not sheathed till it is clogged with slaughter. Masses of naked Indians are brought forward only to be mowed down by the iron hail of artillery, to be trampled under foot by the fiery charge of horsemen, — an apparition that always paralyzed them with terror, — to be pierced through with lances, and cloven down with swords. In such cases, it is idle to talk of the disparity

of numbers. No amount of numbers can make the naked, the timid, and the weak commensurate antagonists to the strong, the brave, and the well armed. A thousand antelopes are not a match for a single lion. The Spaniards had advantages that more than made up for all numerical inferiority, in their horses and their firearms, which were equally new revelations to the simple Indians, and alike invested by them with supernatural terrors. Their crowded ranks only presented a fairer mark to the cannon and arquebuse, and made the confusion, into which they were thrown by charges of cavalry, more extensive and irremediable.

This difficulty did not escape Mr. Prescott's observation, and he has shown his usual judgment in the means employed to obviate it. He has relieved the bloody monotony of the Conquest by a variety of collateral matter, which throws light upon the main narrative, and furnishes us with the information necessary for understanding the story. With this view, he has introduced rather minute descriptions of the states or provinces through which the Spaniards passed in their march to the capital, — such as the holy city of Cholula, the Mecca or Jerusalem of the Aztec race, and the interesting republic of Tlascala, whose rocky fastnesses were defended by that unconquerable valor which seems the natural growth of a mountain soil. His frequent pictures of natural scenery afford the same grateful relief to the mind ; and the same purpose is served by the minute and animated accounts he gives us of the capital, its romantic situation, its peculiar structure, its architectural wonders ; and of Montezuma's habits of life, the ceremonials of his court, and the splendors of his palace. With all this, the eye is always kept fixed upon the city of Mexico as the central point in the picture, and the great prize to be struggled for, and wherever the story is likely to have an engrossing interest from its own nature, it is not broken by any interpolations.

Every well-conditioned mind, that prefers the open daylight of truth to the dim twilight of delusion, will feel pleasure in the distinct views which Mr. Prescott gives of an event, of which most persons, we apprehend, have rather a vague and cloudy impression. We usually read Robertson's narrative early in life, and retain ever afterwards a dreamy image of a romantic enterprise, with no clear apprehension of the means by which it was accomplished. As we look back upon it, it

seems something marvellous and unreal, like the wild adventures of knight-errantry, where giants are slain and princesses rescued, — where, by the prowess of a single arm, rightful kings are restored and usurpers are vanquished. No one will regret the removal of these clouds of delusion, though fancy may have painted them in colors of purple and gold. Amid all the enchantments of his subject, Mr. Prescott has kept unimpaired that sober tone of mind essential to historical inquiry ; has adhered scrupulously to facts, fortifying every statement by reference to original authorities ; has conscientiously investigated all doubtful or disputed points, and given us that full information upon all matters of detail, such as dates, numbers, and dimensions, which can alone make the knowledge we have of any matter entirely satisfactory. Under the guidance of his sagacious judgment and penetrating industry, we are enabled to trace that regular sequence of cause and effect in the successes of Cortés, which, astonishing as they were, takes away their supernatural character. While we acknowledge it to be a very extraordinary enterprise, we perceive that its favorable result was brought about by many accidental and unforeseen circumstances, without any one of which it must have been doubtful, and without some of them, impossible. How greatly, for instance, were they aided in their progress by that remarkable tradition, universally believed, which foretold the downfall of the Aztec empire by a race of men who should come from the East and resemble the Spaniards in physical peculiarities ! a tradition, of which they could have known nothing before they landed, and the effect of which upon so superstitious a people can hardly be overestimated. Of how great importance do we perceive it to be, that Cortés should have the means of communicating with the various tribes or communities which he encountered on his march, and how little to be foreseen were the chances which enabled him to do so by the combined aid of Doña Marina and Jerónimo de Aguilar ! How different a catastrophe might the historian have been called upon to record, if the resolute Guatemozin had occupied the throne, upon the landing of the Spaniards, instead of the vacillating and superstitious Montezuma ; or if the councils of Tlascala had been guided by the unconquerable spirit and clear-sighted sagacity of Xicotencatl ; or if Narvaez, who was sent to supersede Cortés, had been equal to him in en-

ergy and capacity ! And above all, how essentially were the plans of the Spaniards aided by the character of the Aztec empire itself ; an aggregate of distinct communities, with no natural cohesion, and bound together by no stronger ties than those of fear ! Like the iron and clay in the vision, the separate parts were united, but would not coalesce. Cortés conquered Mexico by dividing it ; by fanning into a flame the sparks of disaffection which the terror of Montezuma's name had kept smothered and concealed, by vanquishing the separate portions, and making their inhabitants his allies, and requiring them to serve under his banner. His Indian auxiliaries are entitled to at least an equal share in the honors of the conquest.

In what we have just said, we do not wish to be understood as at all detracting from the merit of those remarkable qualities of character displayed by the Conquerors of Mexico, and especially by Cortés, who was so eminently the heart and soul of the enterprise. Though, under the penetrating light which Mr. Prescott has brought to bear upon the achievement, it may have lost somewhat of its visionary glories, the substantial facts, which claim and justify our sober admiration, are set forth in more distinct relief. To appreciate fully the resolution, hardihood, and perseverance displayed by that band of adventurers, we must go back to their own age, and wrap round ourselves the cloud of their own ignorance. We must remember, that they were, at every step of their progress, discoverers as well as conquerors. They landed upon the shores of a country of which they knew nothing, and boldly set out upon their wonderful march, ignorant of what a day, or an hour might bring forth. They knew not the extent or the resources of the country they invaded ; nor where was its capital city ; nor how far off was the ocean that washed its opposite shores. They knew not in what distinct shape the dangers they were to encounter would present themselves ; whether in that of hunger, or thirst, or cold, or opposing steel. They could not tell what pathless forests, what impassable chains of mountains, what desert wastes of sand might lie between them and the end of their march. It was literally a groping in the dark, where they could only feel sure of the ground on which their very feet were planted. And yet, in spite of all this, — in spite of the power which the imagination has in magnifying un-

known perils, they pressed resolutely on, with nothing but an occasional murmur of discontent, which the address of their leader found no difficulty in allaying, and certainly without any symptom of faint-heartedness. As they toilsomely climbed up the steep mountain-path, encumbered with blackened scoriæ and broken masses of lava, that told of volcanic fires hidden under their dazzling mantles of snow, that might at any moment break out and sweep them away in their resistless fury, and saw in the distant horizon that ocean, that connected them with the world they had left, gradually diminishing to a faint blue line, and at last entirely disappearing from their straining sight, not one cheek grew pale, not one eye was suffused with unmanly tears. What bounds should we set to our admiration of qualities like these, if they had only been exerted in the cause of truth, philanthropy, and religion, and not been dedicated to the service of sordid cupidity, selfish ambition, and ruthless bigotry?

The same effect will be produced in regard to the estimate, which we are now able to form, of the capacity and resources of Cortés. He seems to us to be a greater man than we had ever before supposed. Putting the moral element, the question of right and wrong, entirely aside, — we cannot refuse a constant tribute of admiration to the qualities of mind and character which he displays; to his sagacity, his forecast, his sound judgment, his fertility of invention, his inflexible resolution, his natural eloquence, and that mixture of dignity and affability which won at once the respect and attachment of his grim followers, who would not have brooked, for an hour, the authority of a leader who did not vindicate his claim to command by native superiority. We see in him the virtues alike of the soldier and the commander. Upon him the success of the enterprise rests, and the responsibility of a leader weighs heavily upon his brow, and banishes sleep from his lids; and yet, when the trumpet sounds, we find him gallantly fighting with his own hand, where the strife is most deadly, and the danger most pressing, deciding more than one battle by his own personal prowess; never elated by good fortune, never disheartened by reverses; counterfeiting a cheerfulness when he has it not, and inspiring a confidence which he does not feel. He forms his plans with cautious deliberation, and executes them with lightning-like rapidity. By a brilliant *coup-de-main*, he sur-

prises Narvaez in his bed, and crushes his formidable opposition at a single blow ; and that, too, with a mere handful of followers, badly clothed, imperfectly armed, and wasted by hunger and forced marches. The sagacity, with which he perceived the great assistance that might be derived from the use of brigantines upon the lake of Mexico, shows the prophetic eye of a great military genius ; and the plan, which he subsequently devised, and put into successful execution, of having thirteen vessels of war constructed at Tlascala, taken to pieces, transported sixty miles, across the mountains, on the shoulders of men, and then reconstructed and launched upon the lake, — a stupendous and unparalleled achievement, — is a proof of the highest fertility of invention, of resolute energy, and indomitable perseverance. The wary skill, too, with which he made his approaches to the devoted capital, preparatory to its final siege, the line of circumvallation which he gradually drew around it by his successive conquests, the wise disposition he made of his forces, all argue a military capacity of the highest order, which, had it been displayed upon the grander stage, and with the ampler means of European warfare, would have won such laurels as the “ Great Captain ” himself might have been proud to wear.

One of the most remarkable things in the conquest of Mexico is the short space of time in which it was accomplished. As this is a consideration which a reader is very likely to overlook in the interest of the narrative, we have thought it expedient to give a summary of the dates of the principal events, that it may be more distinctly presented to the mind. The Spaniards landed in Mexico on the twenty-first day of April, 1519. Some months are spent upon the coast, in founding the colony at Vera Cruz, and in friendly intercourse with the natives at Cempoalla. They begin their march to Mexico on the sixteenth day of August. They enter the city of Tlascala on the twenty-third day of September. They arrive at the city of Mexico on the eighth day of November, and pass the winter there. About the middle of May, 1520, Cortés leaves Mexico to encounter the forces of Narvaez, and returns there in triumph on the twenty-fourth day of June. On the first day of July, the Spaniards evacuate the city of Mexico. The battle of Otumba is fought on the eighth day of July ; and in a few days after, the victorious Spaniards reach the friendly city of Tlascala. The

remainder of the summer and the autumn are passed in wars with the neighbouring tribes, in various preparations, and in waiting for reinforcements. They set out from Tlascala, on their return to the city of Mexico, on the twenty-eighth day of December, and enter Tezcuco on the thirty-first day of the same month. Some months are spent in reducing various places bordering on the lake, preparatory to the siege of the capital. The brigantines are launched on the lake on the twenty-eighth day of April, 1521, and the siege soon after begins. The city is captured, and Guatemozin taken prisoner, on the thirteenth day of August of the same year, which completes the conquest. Thus, in little more than two years, was a large and powerful empire, covering a space twice as large as New England, added to the crown of Spain by a handful of adventurers, indifferently armed and equipped, and fighting at their own charges. What parallel can history furnish to this ?

The nature of the enterprise, and the small number of conspicuous persons engaged in it, give the historian but a limited range for the delineation of character. With the exception of Doña Marina, whose gentle and feminine traits shine out from the scenes of blood and violence in which she appears, like "a sunbeam on a stormy sea," and whose amiable qualities have caused her name and memory to be cherished with equal fondness by the descendants of the conquerors and the conquered, our attention is almost wholly absorbed by the two principal personages on each side, Montezuma and Cortés, so unlike in character and in fortune.

No one can look without a feeling of compassionate interest upon the portrait of the Indian Emperor, prefixed to the second volume, which, if not authentic, at least deserves to be so. It has the melancholy expression of one who feels himself unequal to the duties which have been imposed upon him by the hand of Destiny. We read in that drooping brow, and in that "dejected havior of the visage," a consciousness, that the fortunes of the Aztec race, once so flourishing and palmy, had, in his person, fallen "into the sear, the yellow leaf," — that that star of empire, which had so proudly blazed upon the western sky, was now to go down in darkness and blood. He seems to have been one of those characters, not uncommon in history, who, in ordinary times, succeed in giving to others the impression of

qualities which they do not possess, by the aid which they derive from the circumstances of their position, and the fortunate accidents of their lot ; as a strong man can easily appear brave, and a rich man cheaply acquires the reputation of generosity. Called in the prime of life to occupy the throne of a great empire, commanding large armies, and wielding extensive military resources, aided, too, by the divinity that hedged his person and office in the eyes of his subjects, he makes his name a word of terror throughout the whole extent of Mexico, — at which the boldest cheek turns pale, and the stoutest heart throbs with uncomfortable apprehensions. The Spaniards are everywhere told of his military prowess, his irresistible power, the haughty severity of his manners, the terrors of his awakened wrath. Every thing that we hear leads us to expect a character of the heroic stamp, — resolute of purpose, prompt in action, — who would oppose to the progress of the invaders a courage as fiery, and a constancy of purpose as inflexible, as their own. Yet when peril assails him in an unprecedented form, and he falls upon times that try the temper of his soul ; when his palace is darkened by rumors of the mysterious beings that have landed upon the coast, and are marching, in spite of all opposition and resistance, towards the capital ; we find him timid, irresolute, vacillating, and short-sighted ; an object alternately of pity and contempt. He is ever halting between two opinions ; now taking counsel of his hopes, and now of his fears ; losing in weak indecision the golden moments of opportunity ; looking in vain in the oracles of destiny for that support which he should have found in the manly promptings of his own breast ; and at last adopting that half-way course, which was of all others the most impolitic, since it revealed at once his weakness and his wealth. The reader will find a peculiar interest in all the details which Mr. Prescott has given us of the life, character, and habits of this monarch, and especially in the personal anecdotes recorded of him, while a captive in the hands of the Spaniards. The impression which they leave upon us is that of delicacy, gentleness, courtesy, and generosity, — of more of the Christian virtues than dwelt in the stern bosom of his Catholic rival ; and that, if he was a weak sovereign, he was endowed

“ With all good grace to grace a gentleman.”

The following is Mr. Prescott's beautiful sketch of the closing hours of the unfortunate monarch.

"The Indian monarch had rapidly declined, since he had received his injury, sinking, however, quite as much under the anguish of a wounded spirit, as under disease. He continued in the same moody state of insensibility as that already described; holding little communication with those around him, deaf to consolation, obstinately rejecting all medical remedies as well as nourishment. Perceiving his end approach, some of the cavaliers present in the fortress, whom the kindness of his manners had personally attached to him, were anxious to save the soul of the dying prince from the sad doom of those who perish in the darkness of unbelief. They accordingly waited on him, with father Olmedo at their head, and in the most earnest manner implored him to open his eyes to the error of his creed, and consent to be baptized. But Montezuma — whatever may have been suggested to the contrary — seems never to have faltered in his hereditary faith, or to have contemplated becoming an apostate; for surely he merits that name in its most odious application, who, whether Christian or Pagan, renounces his religion without conviction of its falsehood. Indeed, it was a too implicit reliance on its oracles, which had led him to give such easy confidence to the Spaniards. His intercourse with them had, doubtless, not sharpened his desire to embrace their communion; and the calamities of his country he might consider as sent by his gods to punish him for his hospitality to those who had desecrated and destroyed their shrines.

"When father Olmedo, therefore, kneeling at his side, with the uplifted crucifix, affectionately besought him to embrace the sign of man's redemption, he coldly repulsed the priest, exclaiming, 'I have but a few moments to live; and will not, at this hour, desert the faith of my fathers.' One thing, however, seemed to press heavily on Montezuma's mind. This was the fate of his children, especially of three daughters, whom he had by his two wives; for there were certain rites of marriage, which distinguished the lawful wife from the concubine. Calling Cortés to his bedside, he earnestly commended these children to his care, as 'the most precious jewels that he could leave him.' He besought the general to interest his master, the Emperor, in their behalf, and to see that they should not be left destitute, but be allowed some portion of their rightful inheritance. 'Your lord will do this,' he concluded, 'if it were only for the friendly offices I have rendered the Spaniards, and for the love I have shown them, — though it has brought me to this condition! But for this I bear them no ill-will.' Such, according to Cortés him-

self, were the words of the dying monarch. Not long after, on the 30th of June, 1520, he expired in the arms of some of his own nobles, who still remained faithful in their attendance on his person. 'Thus,' exclaims a native historian, one of his enemies, a Tlascalan, 'thus died the unfortunate Montezuma, who had swayed the sceptre with such consummate policy and wisdom; and who was held in greater reverence and awe than any other prince of his lineage, or any, indeed, that ever sat on a throne in this Western World. With him may be said to have terminated the royal line of the Aztecs, and the glory to have passed away from the empire, which under him had reached the zenith of its prosperity.' 'The tidings of his death,' says the old Castilian chronicler, Diaz, 'were received with real grief by every cavalier and soldier in the army who had had access to his person; for we all loved him as a father, — and no wonder, seeing how good he was.' This simple, but emphatic, testimony to his desert, at such a time, is in itself the best refutation of the suspicions occasionally entertained of his fidelity to the Christians.

"It is not easy to depict the portrait of Montezuma in its true colors, since it has been exhibited to us under two aspects, of the most opposite and contradictory character. In the accounts gathered of him by the Spaniards, on coming into the country, he was uniformly represented as bold and warlike, unscrupulous as to the means of gratifying his ambition, hollow and perfidious, the terror of his foes, with a haughty bearing which made him feared even by his own people. They found him, on the contrary, not merely affable and gracious, but disposed to waive all the advantages of his own position, and to place them on a footing with himself; making their wishes his law; gentle even to effeminacy in his deportment, and constant in his friendship, while his whole nation was in arms against them. Yet these traits, so contradictory, were truly enough drawn. They are to be explained by the extraordinary circumstances of his position.

"When Montezuma ascended the throne, he was scarcely twenty-three years of age. Young, and ambitious of extending his empire, he was continually engaged in war, and is said to have been present himself in nine pitched battles. He was greatly renowned for his martial prowess, for he belonged to the *Quachic-tin*, the highest military order of his nation, and one into which but few, even of its sovereigns, had been admitted. In later life, he preferred intrigue to violence, as more consonant to his character and priestly education. In this he was as great an adept as any prince of his time, and, by arts not very honorable to himself, succeeded in filching away much of the territory of his royal kinsman of Tezcuco. Severe in the administration of

justice, he made important reforms in the arrangement of the tribunals. He introduced other innovations in the royal household, creating new offices, introducing a lavish magnificence and forms of courtly etiquette unknown to his ruder predecessors. He was, in short, most attentive to all that concerned the exterior and pomp of royalty. Stately and decorous, he was careful of his own dignity, and might be said to be as great an 'actor of majesty' among the barbarian potentates of the New World, as Louis the Fourteenth was among the polished princes of Europe.

"He was deeply tinctured, moreover, with that spirit of bigotry, which threw such a shade over the latter days of the French monarch. He received the Spaniards as the beings predicted by his oracles. The anxious dread, with which he had evaded their proffered visit, was founded on the same feelings which led him so blindly to resign himself to them on their approach. He felt himself rebuked by their superior genius. He at once conceded all that they demanded, — his treasures, his power, even his person. For their sake, he forsook his wonted occupations, his pleasures, his most familiar habits. He might be said to forego his nature; and, as his subjects asserted, to change his sex and become a woman. If we cannot refuse our contempt for the pusillanimity of the Aztec monarch, it should be mitigated by the consideration, that his pusillanimity sprung from his superstition, and that superstition in the savage is the substitute for religious principle in the civilized man.

"It is not easy to contemplate the fate of Montezuma without feelings of the strongest compassion; — to see him thus borne along the tide of events beyond his power to avert or control; to see him, like some stately tree, the pride of his own Indian forests, towering aloft in the pomp and majesty of its branches, by its very eminence a mark for the thunderbolt, the first victim of the tempest which was to sweep over its native hills! When the wise king of Tezcuco addressed his royal relative at his coronation, he exclaimed, 'Happy the empire, which is now in the meridian of its prosperity, for the sceptre is given to one whom the Almighty has in his keeping; and the nations shall hold him in reverence!' Alas! the subject of this auspicious invocation lived to see his empire melt away like the winter's wreath; to see a strange race drop, as it were, from the clouds on his land; to find himself a prisoner in the palace of his fathers, the companion of those who were the enemies of his gods and his people; to be insulted, reviled, trodden in the dust, by the meanest of his subjects, by those who, a few months previous, had trembled at his glance; drawing his last breath in the halls of the

stranger,—a lonely outcast in the heart of his own capital! He was the sad victim of destiny,—a destiny as dark and irresistible in its march, as that which broods over the mythic legends of Antiquity!” — Vol. II. pp. 342–351.

The colossal character of Cortés, however, absorbs our attention, to the exclusion of almost every thing else. He fills the whole canvass with his mighty stature, and every other personage seems dwarfed by his side. The details which Mr. Prescott has given us of his life, before and after the Conquest, supply us with the means of tracing the connexion and affinity between his tumultuous youth, — restless and uneasy, like that of Oliver Cromwell, from the want of a sphere adequate to his vast energies, — his fiery and enterprising manhood, and his dignified and peaceful decline. We commend entirely the course adopted by Mr. Prescott, in continuing the narrative to the death of Cortés, though the story of the Conquest terminates with the fall of the capital. This impairs, it is true, the proportions of the subject as a narrative of the Conquest, but preserves them more entire as a biography of Cortés, which, in fact, the work really is. The Conquest was only a chapter, though a long and important one, in the crowded life of this extraordinary man. The transition, too, from the horrors of an exterminating contest, and the sickening details of famine and carnage, to the quiet walks of civilization, the aspect of reviving prosperity, the hum of regular industry, the peaceful victories of agriculture, and the progress of maritime discovery, will be felt as a grateful relief to the mind, grown familiar with so much that makes war hateful, so little that makes it stirring. Many of the facts in his life, subsequent to the Conquest, have been drawn from original materials, and will have all the attraction of novelty. The reader will learn with surprise the interesting details of a career of adventurous enterprise after that event, which, in the apprehension of most persons, comprises all the claims of Cortés to be remembered as a historical personage. The respect and admiration, which were awakened by the energy and capacity displayed in the Conquest, will be enhanced by the wisdom which he showed in the government of the country he had won, and by the generous ardor with which, at the lavish sacrifice of his own resources, he prosecuted his schemes of maritime discovery. Most men would have thought the distinction ac-

quired by so wonderful an achievement, a sufficient apology for a life of ease and self-indulgence ; especially as the gratitude of his sovereign had rewarded his inestimable services with honor and wealth,—those glittering prizes which awaken all the faculties in their pursuit, but which, when won, are more likely to blunt than to sharpen the edge of enterprise. He surely might have been pardoned, if, after the toils and perils of the Conquest, he had retired to his ample estates, and quietly occupied himself with their cultivation and improvement, entertaining the friends whom he had gathered round his hospitable table with stories of the dangers he had passed, and perhaps, (as he could handle the pen no less than the sword,) amusing himself with writing a full and connected narrative of those events, of which he had transmitted official reports to his sovereign. But Cortés was a man of another stamp. His indefatigable energy was of that kind which neither wealth, nor honor, nor advancing years had any power to chill or repress. His terrible march to Honduras shows, in their unabated force, all those astonishing qualities of hardihood, resolution, and constancy, which had raised a nameless adventurer to a level with the highest and proudest of the nobles of his country. The voyages of discovery, which he planned with so much sagacity and prosecuted with so much ardor, would, as Mr. Prescott justly observes, have made the glory and satisfied the ambition of a common man ; but they are lost in the brilliant renown of his former achievements. In his fifty-eighth year, we find him embarked as a volunteer in the memorable expedition against Algiers, and, with all his youthful fire, offering to undertake the reduction of the place himself, with the support of the army, and save the arms of Spain from the humiliation of a repulse. The regulations, too, which he made, immediately after the Conquest, for the government of the country he had won, the means which he adopted to repair the ravages of war, to accomplish the settlement of unoccupied territories, and to augment its agricultural resources, show the far-sighted views of a wise statesman, and that great injustice is done by those who confound him with the common herd of successful military adventurers. His is certainly one of the memorable names in history ; endowed with extraordinary qualities of mind and character, which we should never overlook or be insensible to, however strongly our moral indigna-

tion may be awakened by the ends to which he dedicated them.

We quote a portion of Mr. Prescott's eloquent and discriminating estimate of the character of Cortés.

"The personal history of Cortés has been so minutely detailed in the preceding narrative, that it will only be necessary to touch on the more prominent features of his character. Indeed, the history of the Conquest, as I have already had occasion to remark, is necessarily that of Cortés, who is, if I may so say, not merely the soul, but the body, of the enterprise; present everywhere in person, in the thick of the fight, or in the building of the works, with his sword or with his musket, sometimes leading his soldiers, and sometimes directing his little navy. The negotiations, intrigues, correspondence, are all conducted by him; and, like Cæsar, he wrote his own Commentaries in the heat of the stirring scenes which form the subject of them. His character is marked with the most opposite traits, embracing qualities apparently the most incompatible. He was avaricious, yet liberal; bold to desperation, yet cautious and calculating in his plans; magnanimous, yet very cunning; courteous and affable in his deportment, yet inexorably stern; lax in his notions of morality, yet (not uncommon) a sad bigot. The great feature in his character was constancy of purpose; a constancy not to be daunted by danger, nor baffled by disappointment, nor wearied out by impediments and delays.

"He was a knight-errant, in the literal sense of the word. Of all the band of adventurous cavaliers, whom Spain, in the sixteenth century, sent forth on the career of discovery and conquest, there was none more deeply filled with the spirit of romantic enterprise than Hernando Cortés. Dangers and difficulties, instead of deterring, seemed to have a charm in his eyes. They were necessary to rouse him to a full consciousness of his powers. He grappled with them at the outset, and, if I may so express myself, seemed to prefer to take his enterprises by the most difficult side. He conceived, at the first moment of his landing in Mexico, the design of its conquest. When he saw the strength of its civilization, he was not turned from his purpose. When he was assailed by the superior force of Narvaez, he still persisted in it; and, when he was driven in ruin from the capital, he still cherished his original idea. How successfully he carried it into execution, we have seen. After the few years of repose which succeeded the Conquest, his adventurous spirit impelled him to that dreary march across the marshes of Chiapa; and, after another interval, to seek his fortunes on the stormy

Californian Gulf. When he found that no other continent remained for him to conquer, he made serious proposals to the Emperor to equip a fleet at his own expense, with which he would sail to the Moluccas, and subdue the Spice-Islands for the Crown of Castile !

“ This spirit of knight-errantry might lead us to undervalue his talents as a general, and to regard him merely in the light of a lucky adventurer. But this would be doing him injustice ; for Cortés was certainly a great general, if that man be one, who performs great achievements with the resources which his own genius has created. There is probably no instance in history, where so vast an enterprise has been achieved by means apparently so inadequate. He may be truly said to have effected the Conquest by his own resources. If he was indebted for his success to the coöperation of the Indian tribes, it was the force of his genius that obtained command of such materials. He arrested the arm that was lifted to smite him, and made it do battle in his behalf. He beat the Tlascalans, and made them his stanch allies. He beat the soldiers of Narvaez, and doubled his effective force by it. When his own men deserted him, he did not desert himself. He drew them back by degrees, and compelled them to act by his will, till they were all as one man. He brought together the most miscellaneous collection of mercenaries who ever fought under one standard ; adventurers from Cuba and the Isles, craving for gold ; hidalgos, who came from the old country to win laurels ; broken-down cavaliers, who hoped to mend their fortunes in the New World ; vagabonds flying from justice ; the grasping followers of Narvaez, and his own reckless veterans, — men with hardly a common tie, and burning with the spirit of jealousy and faction ; wild tribes of the natives from all parts of the country, who had been sworn enemies from their cradles, and who had only met to cut one another's throats, and to procure victims for sacrifice ; men, in short, differing in race, in language, and in interests, with scarcely any thing in common among them. Yet this motley congregation was assembled in one camp, compelled to bend to the will of one man, to consort together in harmony, to breathe, as it were, one spirit, and to move on a common principle of action ! It is in this wonderful power over the discordant masses thus gathered under his banner, that we recognise the genius of the great commander, no less than in the skill of his military operations.

“ His power over the minds of his soldiers was a natural result of their confidence in his abilities. But it is also to be attributed to his popular manners, — that happy union of authori-

ty and companionship, which fitted him for the command of a band of roving adventurers. It would not have done for him to have fenced himself round with the stately reserve of a commander of regular forces. He was embarked with his men in a common adventure, and nearly on terms of equality, since he held his commission by no legal warrant. But, while he indulged this freedom and familiarity with his soldiers, he never allowed it to interfere with their strict obedience, nor to impair the severity of discipline. When he had risen to higher consideration, although he affected more state, he still admitted his veterans to the same intimacy. 'He preferred,' says Diaz, 'to be called "Cortés" by us, to being called by any title; and with good reason,' continues the enthusiastic old cavalier, 'for the name of Cortés is as famous in our day as was that of Cæsar among the Romans, or of Hannibal among the Carthaginians.' He showed the same kind regard towards his ancient comrades in the very last act of his life. For he appropriated a sum by his will for the celebration of two thousand masses for the souls of those who had fought with him in the campaigns of Mexico.

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"One trait more remains to be noticed in the character of this remarkable man; that is, his bigotry, the failing of the age,—for, surely, it should be termed only a failing. When we see the hand, red with the blood of the wretched native, raised to invoke the blessing of Heaven on the cause which it maintains, we experience something like a sensation of disgust at the act, and a doubt of its sincerity. But this is unjust. We should throw ourselves back (it cannot be too often repeated) into the age; the age of the Crusades. For every Spanish cavalier, however sordid and selfish might be his private motives, felt himself to be the soldier of the Cross. Many of them would have died in defence of it. Whoever has read the correspondence of Cortés, or, still more, has attended to the circumstances of his career, will hardly doubt that he would have been among the first to lay down his life for the Faith. He more than once perilled life, and fortune, and the success of his whole enterprise, by the premature and most impolitic manner in which he would have forced conversion on the natives. To the more rational spirit of the present day, enlightened by a purer Christianity, it may seem difficult to reconcile gross deviations from morals with such devotion to the cause of religion. But the religion taught in that day was one of form and elaborate ceremony. In the punctilious attention to discipline, the spirit of Christianity was permitted to evaporate. The mind, occupied with forms, thinks little of substance. In a worship that is ad-

dressed too exclusively to the senses, it is often the case, that morality becomes divorced from religion, and the measure of righteousness is determined by the creed rather than by the conduct." — Vol. III. pp. 352 – 362.

It may be objected by some persons, that Mr. Prescott has not reprobated with sufficient severity the cruel excesses with which the conquest of Mexico was stained, and that, especially, he has passed too mild a sentence upon the character of Cortés. Undoubtedly, there is room for a tone of more indignant declamation on these points than Mr. Prescott has indulged himself in, and a writer of more impassioned temperament would probably have recorded a more stern and vehement protest. Readers of an enthusiastic humanity will be very likely to regret the measured language which he employs. But they should hear before they condemn. Mr. Prescott did not feel himself called upon to take the ground of a moralist, and to use the events of the Conquest as a theme upon which to discourse, and by means of which to inspire a just horror of bigotry and cruelty. He felt it to be his duty to preserve that sobriety of mind which is ever appropriate to a historian, and to give the Spaniards the advantage, to which they are fairly entitled, of being judged by the standard of their own age — of being tried by their peers. In weighing the errors and crimes which darken the page of history, allowance must be made for the influences of different periods of society, and for the state of public opinion at the time. We must be satisfied, if men are no worse than their neighbours. We have no right to apply to one age the moral standard of another. We do not condemn the suicide of Cato as we do that of a modern felon. If a Lord Chancellor in our times should accept a present from a suitor in his court, a deeper weight of obloquy would rest upon his name than weighs down the memory of the illustrious Bacon, because in his days the practice was not without precedent. A member of Parliament, who should now defend the slave-trade with such arguments as were listened to with favor in the year seventeen hundred and eighty-eight, would find his voice lost in a general hiss of indignation. We do not judge Dryden as we should a dramatic author who should now insult the public with the ribaldry of his "Limberham," or "Wild Gallant." This principle Mr. Prescott has kept steadily in view. He extenuates nothing,

and apologizes for nothing. He relates in temperate language every enormity of the Conquerors, and furnishes them with the explanation to which they are fairly entitled. Now, a reader has a right to say, that this is not the way in which history should be written. He may prefer, that the historian should look at all moral questions from the point of view supplied by his own age, and may insist, that the interests of truth require that all historical personages should be tried by the highest standard. It may be so. But this is not the question. The point at issue is, whether Mr. Prescott is not right, if you grant him his own premises. Take the character of Cortés. It is admitted, that he was treacherous, bigoted, and cruel, and that our admiration of his energy and capacity is ever checked by the moral reprobation which his conduct awakens. But was he any worse than the conspicuous men of action in his time, always excepting Columbus, who was raised above his contemporaries not less by the purity of his motives than by the grandeur of his genius? Nay, more; of all the successful soldiers who have scourged the earth, — the hunters of mankind, from Nimrod to Napoleon, — how many have left a whiter name than his? How many have ever shrunk from falsehood, or cruelty, when an obstacle was to be removed or an advantage to be gained? We abhor the character of Cortés, it is true; but we no less abhor that of hundreds of others of the great names of history, — men who have carved out kingdoms with their swords, who have founded families, and won wealth and honor, whose praises have been sung by venal minstrels, and whose features and forms the glowing canvass and the breathing marble have transmitted to posterity.

The materials for the history of the Conquest, both in manuscript and in print, are various and ample. The writings of Las Casas, Herrera, Oviedo, Camargo, and Toribio furnish information more or less authentic, and either directly or incidentally useful. The letters of Cortés are of great value, as having been written on the spot by the principal actor in the scenes commemorated; but we need dwell no further upon these, as they form the subject of an article in our last Number.* Two of the principal authorities are

* We take the liberty here of correcting a statement, which was inadvertently made in that article, that the publication of Mr. Folsom contains a translation of *all* the despatches of Cortés now extant. There are some which still remain in manuscript, having never been printed.

the chronicles of Gomara and of Bernal Diaz, men resembling each other as little as any two authors who have ever written on the same subject. Gomara was a churchman and a scholar. He became the chaplain of Cortés, upon his return to Spain, after the Conquest, and, after his death, continued in the service of his son. The simple elegance of his style, and the skill with which he arranged his materials, have made his work extensively and permanently popular. His information was derived from the highest sources,—from Cortés himself, and from the other leading actors in the scenes he records. His position in the family of Cortés, however, while it afforded him such advantages in the accumulation of facts, naturally gave him a bias in favor of his patron, which is very perceptible in his work, and which has impaired its value as an authentic history. To the faults of Cortés he is more than a little blind, and to his virtues he is very kind. But we must not judge him too severely. Sturdy independence is a quality for which the chaplains of great men have not, in any age, been famous. The humble and dependent ecclesiastic must have been a man of superhuman virtue to write with strict impartiality the life of his “honored patron,” (to borrow a phrase of poor Peter Pattieson,) to whom he had been so long indebted for protection and for bread. A man of letters does not flourish well in a great man’s shadow.

Bernal Diaz is a writer of quite a different stamp. He was a rough soldier, as little accustomed to the pen as Gomara was to the pike or arquebuse. He was one of those hardy adventurers who left the Old World to seek their fortunes in the New. After various toilsome and perilous enterprises, he enlisted under the banners of Cortés, and remained with him till the close of the Conquest. He was engaged in more than a hundred battles and rencontres, in no one of which did an enemy ever see his back. He was as faithful to his commander as he was brave, and was honored by him with various offices of trust and responsibility. In his old age, nearly half a century after the Conquest, we find him established as *regidor* of the city of Guatemala, having survived his general and nearly all his companions in arms. Here he was doubtless allowed the privileges of an old campaigner; to tell stories of the Conquest, as interminable as those of Dugald Dalgetty about the “Lion of the North”;

and to rail in good set terms at the caprice of fortune, which, after all his toils and dangers, had not recompensed him with either wealth or honors. He wrote his chronicle when very old. He was induced to write by a wish to vindicate to himself and his companions their share in the renown of the Conquest, which was likely to be absorbed by the great reputation of their leader ; and he was further stimulated to continue his narrative by a desire to correct the errors and inaccuracies of Gomara, whose work he did not meet with till he had begun his own. His chronicle is quite a remarkable book, as will appear from Mr. Prescott's own observations upon it.

“ Bernal Diaz, the untutored child of nature, is a most true and literal copyist of nature. He transfers the scenes of real life by a sort of *daguerreotype* process, if I may so say, to his pages. He is among chroniclers what De Foe is among novelists. He introduces us into the heart of the camp, we huddle round the bivouac with the soldiers, loiter with them on their wearisome marches, listen to their stories, their murmurs of discontent, their plans of conquest, their hopes, their triumphs, their disappointments. All the picturesque scenes and romantic incidents of the campaign are reflected in his page as in a mirror. The lapse of fifty years has had no power over the spirit of the veteran. The fire of youth glows in every line of his rude history ; and, as he calls up the scenes of the past, the remembrance of the brave companions who are gone gives, it may be, a warmer coloring to the picture, than if it had been made at an earlier period. Time, and reflection, and the apprehensions for the future, which might steal over the evening of life, have no power over the settled opinions of his earlier days. He has no misgivings as to the right of conquest, or as to the justice of the severities inflicted on the natives. He is still the soldier of the Cross ; and those who fell by his side in the fight were martyrs for the faith. ‘ Where are now my companions ? ’ he asks ; ‘ they have fallen in battle, or been devoured by the cannibal, or been thrown to fatten the wild beasts in their cages ! they whose remains should rather have been gathered under monuments emblazoned with their achievements, which deserve to be commemorated in letters of gold ; for they died in the service of God and of his Majesty, and to give light to those who sat in darkness, — and also to acquire that wealth which most men covet.’ The last motive — thus tardily and incidentally expressed — may be thought by some to furnish a better key than either of the preceding to the conduct of the Conquerors. It is, at all

events, a specimen of that *naïveté* which gives an irresistible charm to the old chronicler ; and which, in spite of himself, unlocks his bosom, as it were, and lays it open to the eye of the reader.

“ It may seem extraordinary, that, after so long an interval, the incidents of his campaigns should have been so freshly remembered. But we must consider, that they were of the most strange and romantic character, well fitted to make an impression on a young and susceptible imagination. They had probably been rehearsed by the veteran again and again to his family and friends, until every passage of the war was as familiar to his mind as the ‘ tale of Troy ’ to the Greek rhapsodist, or the interminable adventures of Sir Lancelot or Sir Gawain to the Norman minstrel. The throwing of his narrative into the form of chronicle was but repeating it once more.

“ The literary merits of the work are of a very humble order ; as might be expected from the condition of the writer. He has not even the art to conceal his own vulgar vanity, which breaks out with a truly comic ostentation in every page of the narrative. And yet we should have charity for this, when we find that it is attended with no disposition to depreciate the merits of others, and that its display may be referred in part to the singular simplicity of the man. He honestly confesses his infirmity, though, indeed, to excuse it. ‘ When my chronicle was finished,’ he says, ‘ I submitted it to two licentiates, who were desirous of reading the story, and for whom I felt all the respect which an ignorant man naturally feels for a scholar. I besought them, at the same time, to make no change or correction in the manuscript, as all there was set down in good faith. When they had read the work, they much commended me for my wonderful memory. The language, they said, was good old Castilian, without any of the flourishes and finicalities so much affected by our fine writers. But they remarked, that it would have been as well, if I had not praised myself and my comrades so liberally, but had left that to others. To this I answered, that it was common for neighbours and kindred to speak kindly of one another ; and, if we did not speak well of ourselves, who would ? Who else witnessed our exploits and our battles, — unless, indeed, the clouds in the sky, and the birds that were flying over our heads ? ’

“ Notwithstanding the liberal encomiums passed by the licentiates on our author’s style, it is of a very homely texture ; abounding in colloquial barbarisms, and seasoned occasionally by the piquant sallies of the camp. It has the merit, however, of clearly conveying the writer’s thoughts, and is well suited to

their simple character. His narrative is put together with even less skill than is usual among his craft, and abounds in digressions and repetitions, such as vulgar gossips are apt to use in telling their stories. But it is superfluous to criticize a work by the rules of art, which was written manifestly in total ignorance of those rules ; and which, however we may criticize it, will be read and re-read by the scholar and the school-boy, while the compositions of more classic chroniclers sleep undisturbed on their shelves.

“ In what, then, lies the charm of the work ? In that spirit of truth which pervades it ; which shows us situations as they were, and sentiments as they really existed in the heart of the writer. It is this which imparts a living interest to his story ; and which is more frequently found in the productions of the untutored penman solely intent upon facts, than in those of the ripe and fastidious scholar occupied with the mode of expressing them.

“ It was by a mere chance that this inimitable chronicle was rescued from the oblivion into which so many works of higher pretensions have fallen in the Peninsula. For more than sixty years after its composition, the manuscript lay concealed in the obscurity of a private library, when it was put into the hands of Father Alonso Remon, Chronicler General of the Order of Mercy. He had the sagacity to discover, under its rude exterior, its high value in illustrating the history of the Conquest. He obtained a license for the publication of the work, and under his auspices it appeared at Madrid in 1632, — the edition used in the preparation of these volumes.” — Vol. II. pp. 478 – 480.

The above extract is from a part of Mr. Prescott's book which we commend to the particular attention of his readers, some of whom might, but for this timely caution, skip over it in their impatience to follow the course of the narrative, and others be repelled by the finer type in which it is printed. We refer to his admirable biographical sketches, and elaborate criticisms of his principal authorities. These we have found among the most attractive portions of the work. They supply that information, which a reader of any curiosity desires to obtain, respecting the authors whom he finds constantly referred to, and the books which are relied upon as original authorities. Mr. Prescott has evidently prepared them with great care, and, in point of literary merit, they are not inferior to any portion of the text. Some of them, as, for instance, those devoted to Boturini and Sahagun, contain curious

literary anecdotes ; and others, as those upon Las Casas, Solís, and that upon Bernal Diaz, from which we have just quoted, are written with such taste, elegance, and discrimination, as show Mr. Prescott to be as well qualified to excel in literary biography and criticism as in history. He has also appended to his text a copious array of notes, which are devoted to criticism, to citations for corroborating the text, or to explanations of statements made therein, and which never depart from the legitimate province of notes. As the substance of the text is very frequently repeated in the notes, he has, in such cases, deemed it proper to retain them in the original Spanish. In the second part of the Appendix, will be found a variety of curious original documents. The whole work is aptly terminated by a full and correct Index, without which any book dealing in facts is as defective as a pitcher without a handle, or a town-meeting without a moderator.

We deem it unnecessary to make any detailed observations upon the style in which this work is written, since it has essentially the same qualities as those which throw an unvarying charm over the pages of the history of Ferdinand and Isabella. Mr. Prescott is not a mannerist in his style, and does not deal in elaborate, antithetical, nicely balanced periods. His sentences are not cast in the same artificial mould, nor is there a perpetual recurrence of the same turns of expression, as in the writings of Johnson or Gibbon ; nor have they that satin-like smoothness and gloss, for which Robertson is so remarkable. The dignified simplicity of his style is still further removed from any thing like pertness, smartness, or affectation ; from tawdry gum-flowers of rhetoric, and brass-gilt ornaments ; from those fantastic tricks with language, which bear the same relation to good writing that vaulting and tumbling do to walking. It is perspicuous, flexible, and natural ; sometimes betraying a want of high finish, but always manly, always correct, never feeble, and never inflated. He does not darkly insinuate statements, or leave his reader to infer facts. Indeed, it may be said of his style, that it has no marked character at all. Without ever offending the mind or the ear, it has nothing that attracts observation to it, simply as a style. It is a transparent medium, through which we see the form and movement of the writer's mind. In this respect, we may compare it with the manners

of a well-bred gentleman, which have nothing so peculiar as to awaken attention, and which, from their very ease and simplicity, enable the essential qualities of the understanding and character to be more clearly discerned.

We have thus endeavoured to express our sense of the merits of Mr. Prescott's work. The reader, who has accompanied us thus far in our remarks, may be inclined to ask, if we have no alloy of censure to mingle with the fine gold of our praise ; if our commendation is to be not only ample, but unmeasured. We admit, that we have written our notice in a friendly spirit, and that we took up the book with a prepossession in its favor,—with that wish to be pleased, which is as effectual in securing its object as the wish to please. Unquestionably, the book, like every other work of man's device, affords some scope for the indulgence of a spirit of minute and peevish criticism. To all the views and opinions which it contains, we are not inclined to give an unqualified assent. Upon some of them, we do not feel competent to pronounce a judgment. We have sometimes found a simple statement of a fact, where we should have preferred the addition of an indignant comment. Many of the sentences would have fallen with a richer music upon the ear, with some changes in their structure and rhythm. But in looking upon the work as a whole, and from the proper point of view, every thing else is lost and forgotten in the general blaze of its merits. And, if we do not deceive ourselves, such would have been our judgment, had it been put into our hands as a translation from one of the manuscripts of the Mexican gentleman, so often quoted in its pages, with nine consonants in his name, or dropped down from the clouds upon our table. It is a noble work ; judiciously planned, and admirably executed ; rich with the spoils of learning easily and gracefully worn ; imbued everywhere with a conscientious love of the truth, and controlled by that unerring good sense, without which genius leads astray with its false lights, and learning encumbers with its heavy panoply. It will win the literary voluptuary to its pages by the attractiveness of its subject and the flowing ease of its style ; and the historical student will do honor to the extent and variety of the research which it displays, and to the thoroughness with which its investigations have been conducted. We can confidently predict for it an extensive and permanent popularity. It is not destined, after

the gloss of novelty is worn off, to moulder away in booksellers' garrets, or to sleep, undisturbed, upon their highest shelves. It is not made of those destructible materials, which the stream of time bears off with it in its rapid flow. It will take its place among those enduring productions of the human mind, which age cannot stale, and custom cannot wither.

We cannot take a final leave of this work without a word of commendation upon the manner in which it has been brought out by the publishers. The page is slightly and well proportioned, the types are clear and distinct, and the paper is good. It is printed with singular accuracy. For much of its typographical elegance, and for all of its typographical correctness, it is indebted to the taste, skill, and industry of Messrs. Metcalf, Keith, and Nichols, of Cambridge, printers to the University, at whose foundery the stereotype plates were cast, — a fact, which we are the more particular in mentioning, as we perceive that the usual announcement of it is omitted upon the reverse of the title-page. For the accuracy of the typography, they deserve great credit, as the notes swarm with numeral references, with proper names, and with quotations from foreign languages, particularly with obsolete forms of the Spanish ; and every author knows how difficult it is to insure correctness in such cases. The cause of the omission which we have noticed we are at a loss to conjecture. We would respectfully suggest to the Messrs. Harper, whether it would not be more consonant, — we will not say with generosity, — but with that justice which renders to every man his due, to amend this matter in their next edition. We assure them, in an entirely friendly spirit, that the thing does not look well as it now stands.
